SOCIAL COMEPETENCES OF STUDENTS AS AN ELEMENT SHAPING HUMAN POTENTIAL WITHIN POLAND, LITHUANIA, SLOVAKIA AND SPAIN

DANUTA MIŁASZEWICZ, RAFAŁ NAGAJ

Abstract

The aim of the paper is to discuss and analyse the social competence of students in the light of the results of a questionnaire survey on their social capital. The survey was carried out among students starting education at the Faculty of Economics and Management, University of Szczecin, Poland, of the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration University in Vigo (Spain) in 2013, of the Faculty of Politics and Management at the Mykolas Romeris University in Vilnius, Lithuania in 2014 and of the Faculty of Economics University at the Matej Bel in Banska Bystrica, Slovakia in 2015. The paper is theoretical and empirical. The first part of the paper is intended to review the literature on the subject of social competence. The methodology and characteristics of the respondents are presented in the second part of the paper. The aim of the next part is to present the results of the research on the social competences of the studied students. The basic research method is survey research and basic descriptive statistics methods such as chain indexes or correlation coefficients. The findings of the analysis suggest they have not developed a high level of social competence, which may stem from the limited scope of social networks which they belong to, a lack of generalized trust and trust in institutions as well as, despite their enormous potential, unwillingness to adopt civic approach and civil awareness.

Key words: social competence, social capital, empirical studies.

Classification JEL: Z00 – Other Special Topics: General.

1. Introduction

The human being, as a dynamic entity, updates, apart from the biological ones, also the purely human abilities (potentialities) given to them in their lives. This updating may in particular turn into human capital, being a derivative of human potential *(Zabierowski, 2011: 372)*. Human potential is the entirety of the possibilities which are currently available to a given human being *(Adamiec, 2011: 117)*. Its essence are the features and characteristics held by human beings, which decide on their current and future ability to carry out various tasks. It is a set of these possibilities, abilities, skills and motivations inherent to human beings. The development of human potential may be interpreted on the level of individuals, teams of employees, an entire organization, or the entire society. One should understand it as a constant process of increase and learning and as a permanent element of the professional life of the employees on the contemporary labor market *(Moczydłowska, 2010: 81)*. Human potential is developed in a specified social and organizational environment. In the professional context, human potential is created by four elements: competences, preferences, attitude towards oneself and external conditions. The last of the aforementioned enables to use competences in accordance with preferences *(Adamiec 2011: 120)*.

Therefore, competences are an important element of the human potential. These are understood as a set of knowledge, experiences, skills, talents, behaviors and attitudes *(Sajkiewicz, 2001: 30; Otten & Ohana 2009: 8; Bacigalupo, Kampylis, Punie & Van den Brande, 2016: 2)*. They are the features (characteristics) of an individual which are underlying their effective actions or behaviors *(Woodruffe, 2003: 94)*. Mutual connections and the complexity of the contemporary world require from an individual to have varied competences, which will allow them to efficiently function in various and dynamically changing conditions. Particularly high, and constantly growing requirements are set by the labor market. This market never was, never is, and never will be a perfectly competitive market, taking into consideration

even the heterogeneousness of both the demand and the supply on this market. Any competences and qualifications characterizing human resources reflect the differences in the distribution of knowledge, skills, behaviors, attitudes and predispositions among individuals, but also the differences in their productivity. Maintaining a high level of employee involvement requires setting free their minds, emotions, attitudes, behaviors and interpersonal skills necessary both for the development of individual careers, and for achieving success by the organization *(Jinadasa, 2015)*. Nowadays, competences are becoming, along with knowledge, enan organization's most important resource, and the labor market has been transformed into a market of competences *(Civelli, 1998)*. The contemporary employee recruitment system based on competences should supplement, or even replace, the system based on the education degrees held. However, one should remember that competences, which have served human resources well in the past, will not be sufficient to develop these resources in the future *(Jinadasa, 2015)*.

Competences are necessary in various areas of life, that is why one can distinguish, inter alia, political, economic, social skills. Competences define a subject's potential determining his or her ability to carry out specific activities and have an individual or social extent (component, scope). The social scope of a competence relates to the relations with other people and its aim is to solve varied social problems *(Męczkowska, 2003)*. On the one hand, individuals in possession of an appropriate set of features are 'attractive for employment' *(Clarke, 2008)* and demonstrate bigger entrepreneurship. On the other hand, employers are aware that it is easier to fill the knowledge, qualification, or even professional competences gap for a given employee, and it is more difficult to give rise to a given employee's social skills. For that reason, when an employee already has social skills when starting their work, this becomes an individual's predisposition which the employers find desirable. As for the individuals themselves, this allows them to effectively seek employment or to conduct business activity, achieve professional success, or achieve various goals in their lives. An individual's social skills become also important from the point of view of the effective functioning of the entire society in the striving for the completion of community goals.

The main goal of this article is the analysis of social skills held by students (Polish, Lithuanian, Slovakian and Spanish) starting their economic education at university level. Chosen social skills are presented on the basis of surveys on the social capital of this group of people. The analysis refers only to the chosen results of this research. The article is theoretical and empirical in nature. The aim of the first part of the article is an overview of the literature on the subject of social skills. In the second part, the authors present the research methods and characterize the respondents. The aim of the next part of the article is presenting the obtained research results.

2. The essence and meaning of social skills – an overview of the literature on the subject

In the literature on the subject, there are many different definitions of social skills, formulated most of all on the grounds of psychology, sociology and pedagogy. The category of social skills appears more and more often in economical deliberations, where they are considered in the context of the display and effects of social capital, currently treated as an important factor in the diversification of social-economic development of various communities. In the literature on the subject, social skills are understood as (in chronological order):

- The interaction of fundamental abilities used in certain types of situations *(Greenspan, 1981; Riggio, 1986)*;
- A general ability manifesting in many various situations *(Jakubowska, 1996)*;

- The ability to create and maintain positive social results and mutual relations through organizing one's own personal and environmental resources *(Boyom & Parke, 1995; Ladd, 1999);*
- "The ability, having the skills necessary to have the desired influence on other people in social situations" *(Argyle, 1999);*
- Specific skills which depend on the context and are manifested in behavior *(Biermann & Welsh 2001);,*
- A repertoire of skills, this including the knowledge of social behavior standards, solving social problems, recognizing and understanding emotions and the efficiency of communication and language *(McCabe & Meller, 2004);*
- "Complex skills conditioning the effectiveness of handling certain types of social situations, acquired by an individual in the course of social training" *(Matczak, 2007);*
- A key element of life skills, necessary for appropriate functioning in the dynamic contemporary world, which every young human should have *(Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2008);*
- "The ability to engage in relations, community actions, abilities to utilize social networks and freedom of choice and critical judgment" *(Nurmi, 2011);*
- The ability to efficiently create and maintain positive social results and mutual relations through organizing one's own personal and environmental resources *(Holopainen, Lappalainen, Junttila & Savolainen, 2012);*
- A conglomerate of many factors relating to an individual's functioning in various dimensions: cognitive ('I know'), motivational-emotional ('I want') and behavioral ('I act'), *(Wiszejko-Wierzbicka, 2012);*
- A sum of knowledge and skills of a person who is determined on the quality of socially appropriate behavior *(Reitz 2012: 8)*;
- The outcome of the entirety of experiences obtained by an individual in the socialization process, which are developed in formal and informal education systems *(Karl-Heinz & Lindner, 2012)*;
- The processes encompassing: perception/understanding of a social situation, manner of behavior and the accompanying feelings, sympathies or antipathies *(Szołtysek, Jeż & Twaróg, 2015)*;
- Depending on the level of formal education, the skills conditioning the effective self-management and high interpersonal efficiency, the possibility to find oneself and achieve success on the labor market, in business, very often decisive on the level of the achieved remuneration *(Smółka, 2016: 15)*.

Therefore, social skills are defined in various ways – however, none of their definitions has gained common acceptance. The overview of various approaches to social skills presented herein, generalizing or elaborating on this category, indicates also the various sources of social skills, thus making it impossible to use this term unambiguously.

In addition, social skills may be analyzed in a statistical or dynamic approach. They may also be of various nature: adaptive, emancipatory and critical. The statistical approach to social skills assumes that the abilities creating them are behaviors leading to initiating, maintaining and ending interpersonal relations. The dynamic approach, on the other hand, describes them as intentional behaviors, adapted to certain situations, trained and controlled by the individual *(Spitzberg & Cupach, 2002)*.

The adaptive skills allow for efficiency and effectiveness of actions, finding oneself on the labor market, being resourceful and communicative. It is precisely this aspect of the nature of social skills which is emphasized on grounds of economics. Emancipatory social skills allow to understand the social reality, make choices and act with the awareness of the consequences of

these choices (e.g. the awareness of social roles, the readiness to act in public interest). Finally, the critical social skills allow to notice the justifications legitimizing one's own actions and social practices, enabling the understanding of one's own situation and contexts in which creative, independent and ethical actions are taking place *(Góralska & Solarczyk-Szewc, 2012)*.

The meaning of social skills can also be presented from various points of view. Considering them with respect to the individual (the micro perspective) makes one realize that they are reflected in the human being's functioning through the cognitive, emotional-motivational and social aspects *(Szołtysek, Jeż & Twaróg, 2015)*. Owing to high social skills, individuals cope better and function more effectively in many various social situations *(Martkowska, 2012: 19)*, they have the ability to create and maintain high-quality relations which are mutually satisfactory, and to avoid negative treatment or victimization by others *(Welsh & Biermann, 2001)*.

When considering socials skills in the context of the entire society (the macro perspective), one can analyze them as interpersonal and cross-cultural skills encompassing the full scope of behaviors preparing people for participation (in an effective and constructive manner) in social life, especially in a more and more diversified society, as well as, if need be, to solve conflicts. Their subgroup are civic competences, which prepare people for full participation in civil life, based on the knowledge of socio-political terms and structures, as well as an obligation to active and democratic participation *(European Communities, 2007)*. Social skills are mentioned among the eight groups of key competences in a society based on knowledge, ensuring a bigger flexibility of work resources and enabling faster adjusting to constant chances in a more and more connected world *(Otten, Ohana, 2009: 20)*. They are necessary in undertaking global challenges, solving problems and striving for achieving common good − therefore, they can support social transformation and build cooperation between nations *(OECD, 2005; UNESCO, 2014)*.

Social skills constitute the main requirement for the creation of social relations and forming connections with society. They enable proper social interactions and make intra-group and inter-group cooperation easier, and, owing to the created social connection networks, trust and shared norms and values, they are a basis for social capital *(Lifelong Learning Programme EU, 2009)*. This capital may "generate profits for society through reducing transaction costs, promoting cooperative behaviors, diffusion of knowledge and innovation, as well as through increasing individual welfare and the positive effects resulting from this" *(Productivity Commission, 2003)*.

3. Research methods and description of the analyzed groups

Statistical surveys of social capital[1], the chosen results of which were used for the analysis of social skills, were conducted amongst students of economic studies on four universities: one in Poland, one in Spain, one in Lithuania, and one in Slovakia. The students of the Faculty of Economics and Management of the University of Szczecin (Poland) took part in research in October and November 2013. The students of the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration University in Vigo (Spain) were surveyed in November 2013. Among the students of the Faculty of Politics and Management at the Mykolo Romerio University in Vilnius (Lithuania), the research was conducted in November 2014. Finally, students of the Faculty of Economics at the Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica (Slovakia) were surveyed in November 2015. In all of the aforementioned cases, the research was conducted in

---

the first months of the academic year, and the respondents were first year students who were beginning their economic education at academic level. The survey used in the research was presented to them in their native language and consisted of two parts. The first part (the personal data) included 13 questions referring to the respondents' socio-demographic data. The second part of the survey consisted of 36 open and closed questions, encompassing questions concerning social capital without division into its types *(Milczarek et al., 2015: 95)*. When creating the survey used in the research, the authors have applied the logical diagram proposed by the World Bank *(Grootaert et al., 2004)*. Therefore, the survey included questions referring to the six thematic areas distinguished by the World Bank: groups and networks, trust and solidarity, activeness and cooperation, information and communication, integrity and integration, social legitimization and participation in political life[2].

The description of the circumstantial research sample is presented in table 1.

Table 1. Description of the research sample (own study)

Itemization	Poland	Lithuania	Slovakia	Spain
Sample size	267	113	153	59
The percentage of respondents in total number of students at given academic year	58.0%	51.4%	51.0%	52.0%
Age (average)	19.9 years	19.3 years	19.5 years	22.3 years
Standard age deviation	1.3 years	1.7 years	0.8 years	5.4 years
Involvement of women	67.3%	76.1%	81.7%	71.2%
Involvement of men	32.7%	23.9%	18.3%	28.8%
Respondent involvement depending on the place of permanent residence	69.6% West Pomeranian Voivodeship	60.2% Vilnius County	36.6%/25.5% B. Bystrica/ Žilina Region	100.0% Galicia

The circumstantial research sample was 58.0% of Polish respondents, 51.4% of Lithuanian respondents, 51.0% of Slovakian respondents, and 52% of Spanish respondents out of all students of the first year at these faculties[3]. All the respondent groups consisted of people approximately 20 years old, whereby the students from Spain were on average approximately 2 years older. The students from this country who were analyzed were the most diversified group with regard to age, and the smallest diversification regarding age could be observed for respondents from Slovakia. Most of the respondents came from regions where there are universities in which they started studying. These two characteristics of the research sample, as well as the fact that the involvement of women among the respondents was significantly bigger, particularly big in the case of Slovakian students, may have influenced the obtained results.

Other characteristics of the respondents were determined on the basis of the answers given to one of the questions concerning the self-assessment of chosen features of the respondents. The students evaluated their features with reference to a five-point scale (scope 2, 1, 0, −1, 2). Figure 1 presents the percentage of respondents indicating an extremely positive mark (2) for the given features.

---

[2] A description of these areas is given in: *(Miłaszewicz, 2014)*.

[3] The calculation of the involvement of the respondents in the total number of first year students was conducted on the basis of information obtained from the dean's offices during the time of the surveys. The number of students recorded at the first year at the time was, as a general rule, bigger than that of the students who were actually studying at that time. Correction of the total number of students with the number of students who were recorded for the first year of studies, but who did not in fact undertake the studies at these faculties, was possible only after the review of the first semester. Therefore, this was not possible at the time the survey was conducted.
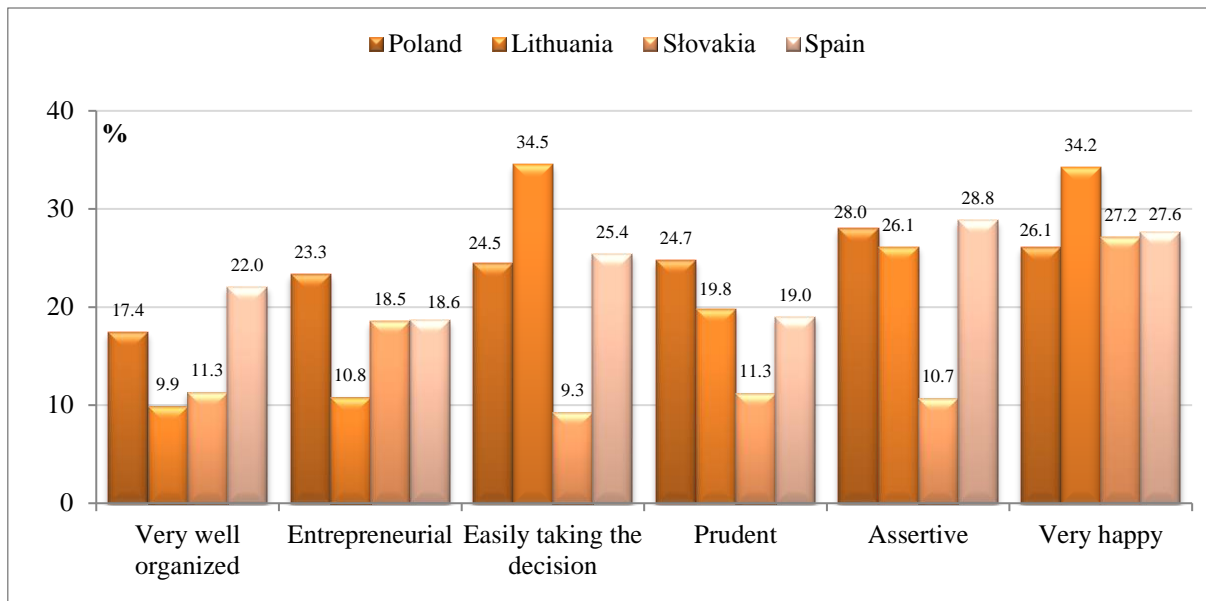
Figure 1. Characteristics of respondents resulting from their self-assessment (own study)

Positively less than half of the students of each of the ethnic groups surveyed have ascribed themselves the extremely positive mark for each of the mentioned features. In the case of the respondent ethnic groups taken into consideration, one can observe the following differences:

- More Polish than Lithuanian, Slovakian or Spanish students rate themselves better with respect to resourcefulness (23.3%) and use caution when making decisions and acting (24.7%); this is, however, less than ¼ of the surveyed Poles;
- More than 1/3 of the Lithuanian respondents rate themselves as very easily making decisions (34.5%) and very happy (34.2%) and this is the biggest number in the assessment of these features in comparison to the other ethnic groups;
- Positively, the least Slovakian respondents rate themselves as assertive people (10.7%) who make decisions and act easily (9.3%), and who proceed with caution (11.3%);
- More respondents from Spain than from Poland, Lithuania and Slovakia consider themselves very well organized (22.0%) and assertive (28.8%).

The presented characteristics may constitute the basis for the further analysis of the social skills of the respondents. For instance, the entrepreneurship competence is mentioned as one from the basic set of competences necessary for personal development, employment, social inclusion and active citizenship *(Bacigalupo, Kampylis, Punie & Van den Brande, 2016: 2)*. Having the analyzed features at a higher level should have its reflection in higher social skills of the respondents, therefore e.g. in their abilities to engage in relations, community actions, in their attitudes and shared social norms.

4. Analysis of chosen social skills – research results

When analyzing the social capital of the students from the point of view of their social skills, the authors have chosen for the description only a part of the questions creating a rather extensive survey. The choice was made in a manner enabling picturing some social skills of the respondents. The results which are presented below constitute answers only to 7 chosen questions and characterize the participation of the respondents in formal and informal networks, their level of trust towards other people and their attitudes, norms and values they believe in.

Figure 2 concludes the answers of the respondents characterizing their participation in formal networks (activity in non-governmental organizations – panel A of Figure 2) and in informal networks (participation in charity events – panel B of Figure 2). Associating in the 3rd sector organizations and the positions held within them, being an important indicator of social capital, indicates such skills as acting responsible for the benefit of a larger community or work towards achieving a common goal. These elements of social solidarity, which is motivated by a feeling of community and co-responsibility and oriented towards a common good or the improvement of less well-off individuals, allow to help those who would not be able to manage individually (horizontal solidarity) and those in need (vertical solidarity), *(Rymsza, 2008)*. Therefore, social solidarity is connected with charitableness, which is also a requirement for social integrity and an important element of the civil society, within which social capital is accumulated. Actions related to charity can be undertaken by the respondents both within their associating in non-governmental organizations, as well as in private participation in charity events.
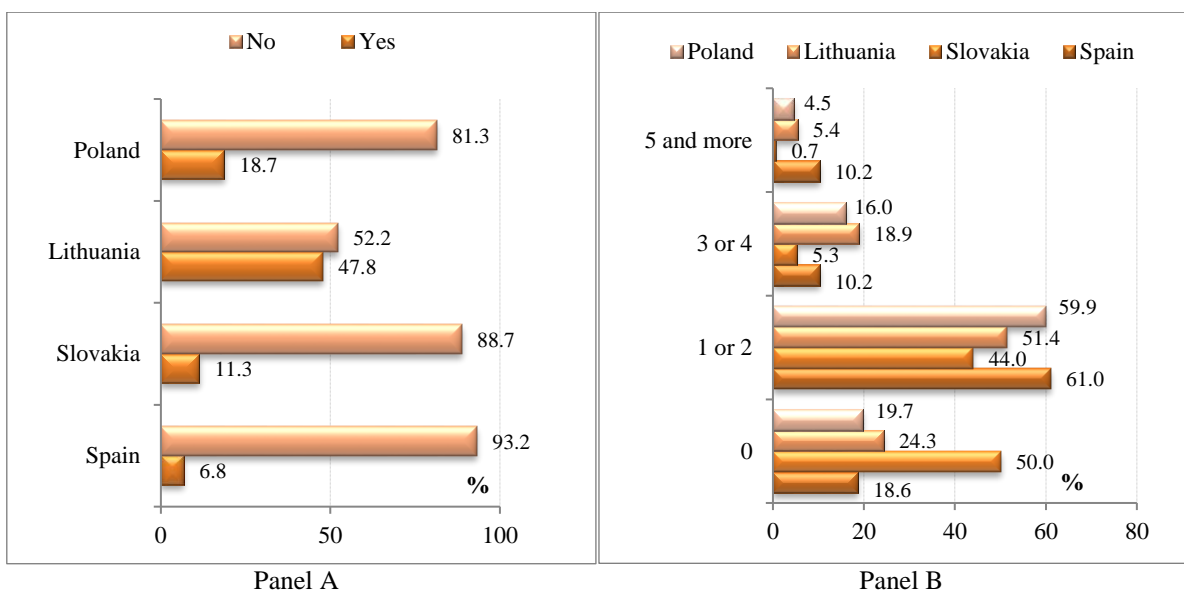

Figure 2. Activities in NGOs (panel A % of responses) and participation in charitable actions (panel B the number of times a year), (own study)

As for the ethnic groups in the survey, the respondents from Lithuania seem to be the most active with respect to participation in non-governmental organizations. Almost a half of them have declared such participation. Regarding the group from Spain, only 6.8% of the respondents declared participation in non-governmental organizations, and as for the Slovakian respondents, this was only 11.3% and it was almost 40% less than for the Polish respondents. The number of participations in charity events (Figure 2 panel B) indicates that the Slovakian respondents are characterized by a lower level of such social skills as responsible actions towards the benefit of a larger community or working towards achieving a common goal, which define their social solidarity. Half of them, within a year before the survey, have not taken part in charity events, 44% have declared 1- or 2-time participation, and merely 5.7% have participated 3–4 times. On the other hand, over 80% of the surveyed Spaniards have taken part in such events at least once within a year before the survey (61% 1–2 times and over 10% 3–4 times and more than 5 times). Also in the case of the Polish respondents, over 80% of them have indicated that their household has taken part in such events within the last year. However, nearly 60% have declared 1–2 time participation, 16% 3–4 times, and only 4.5% of the respondents declared more frequent participation. As for the Lithuanian respondents, almost ¼

declared that their households did not participate in any charity events within the previous year, or have participated in such events at least 3 times, and 51.4% declared 1–2 time participation in such events. Therefore, the biggest commitment to community actions related to charity can be attributed to the Spanish respondents.

Trust, which in the literature on the subject is perceived as an element, display or attribute of social capital, and at the same time the basis of its creation and accumulation *(Miłaszewicz, 2016)*, is a link connecting people into coherent communities. It is also an important component of social skills, since it allows to have the desired influence on other people in social situations. From the social point of view, the ability to build trust, give it to others and experience it, is a basis for social involvement and the readiness to build a society ensuring achieving supra individual goals. This does not concern only private (personal) trust, but mainly the generalized trust, which, during human existence, is influenced by experience, meaning social training. Generalized trust is one of the dimensions of the so-called social trust, being the basis for its second dimension – institutional trust. Therefore, the effective cooperation of an individual with the surroundings depends on the experience of social trust – both towards other people (Figure 3 panels A and B) and towards the authorities and public institutions (Figure 4).
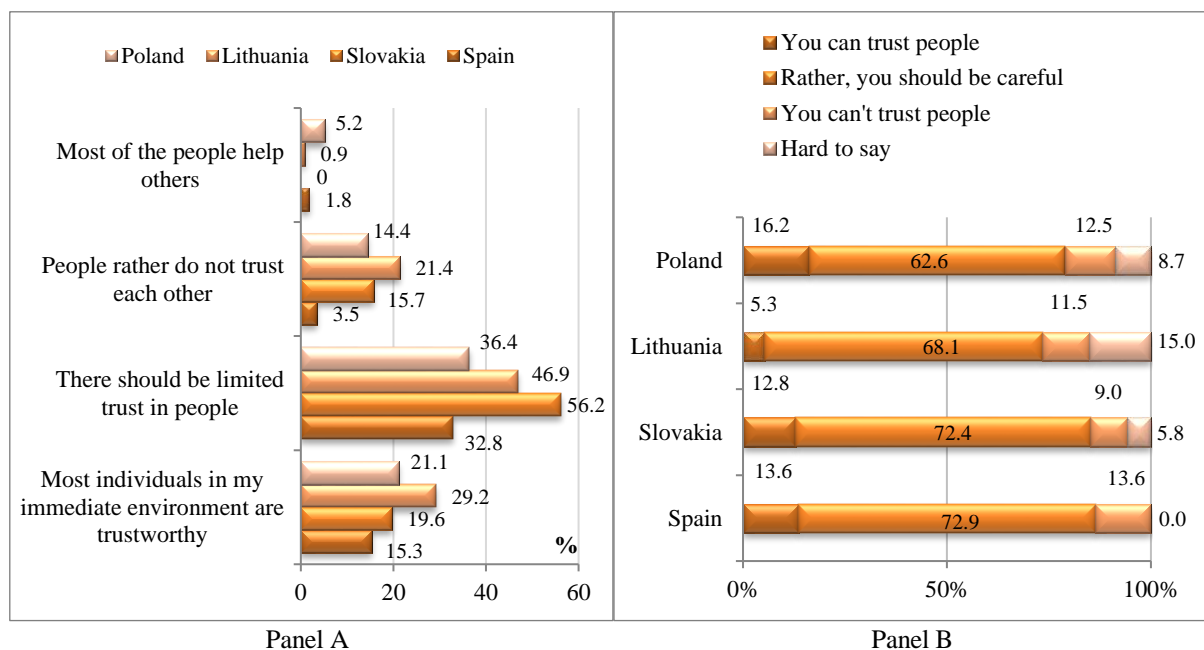

Panel A   Panel B

Figure 3. Generalized trust (panel A % of answers 'Definitely yes'; panel B % of responses), (own study)

The opinions of the respondents on trust towards people indicate that the students surveyed do not give trust to others, but also do not experience trust from others. A vast majority of the respondents from each academic center (72.9% of the surveyed Spaniards, 72.4% Slovaks, 68.1% Lithuanians and 62.6% Poles) have expressed an opinion that one should be cautious in contacts with other people (Figure 3 panel B). However, as many as 9% respondents from Slovakia, and only 11.5% from Lithuania, 12.5% from Poland and 13.6% from Spain think that people in general cannot be trusted. Only 5.2% of the Lithuanian respondents agree with the general statement that people can be trusted. Respondents sharing this opinion are found much more often: almost twice (12.8%) for the Slovakian respondents, 2.5 times more Spanish (13.6%), and 3 times more Polish (16.2%). What is surprising is the fact that as many as 15% of the respondents from Lithuania do not have an opinion on trust towards other people, and the same response was given by 6.7% of the respondents from Poland and 5.8% of the

respondents from Slovakia. This indicated that the respondents from these ethnic groups severely lack the ability to build trust, give it to others and experience it.

Only 30% of the respondents from Lithuania, 21% from Poland and 20% from Slovakia think that most of the people from their surroundings are trustworthy (fig. 3 panel A). The same answer was given by only slightly above 15% of the respondents from Spain. Over 56% of the respondents from Slovakia, almost 47% from Lithuania, over 36% respondents from Poland and almost 33% from Spain agree with the statement that people should be given limited trust. This personal opinion of the students is not always transferred onto the other members of a community. Only 3.5% of the Spanish respondents believe that people in general do not trust each other. This opinion is shared by 4 times more Polish and Slovakian respondents and by more than 6 times more Lithuanian students. Their extremely negative opinion concerning the helpfulness of the members of their community may stem from their deficit of generalized trust. Only approximately one percent of the respondents from Lithuania, twice as many from Spain, and over 5.5 times more from Poland fully agree with the statement that people help one another. None of the respondents in Slovakia fully agreed with this statement.

Experiencing trust towards authorities and public institutions is also basis for an individual's social involvement, their readiness to build a community ensuring achieving supra individual goals and the effective cooperation with the surroundings. In the research on the social capital of the students, the level of trust towards the authorities and chosen public institutions was measured on the basis of the five-level Likert scale[4]. Due to the fact that none of the Spanish respondents chose the answer 'fully trust' or 'rather trust', in the analysis of the institutional trust, the authors have compared the percentage of the respondents who entirely do not trust the institutions mentioned in Figure 4.
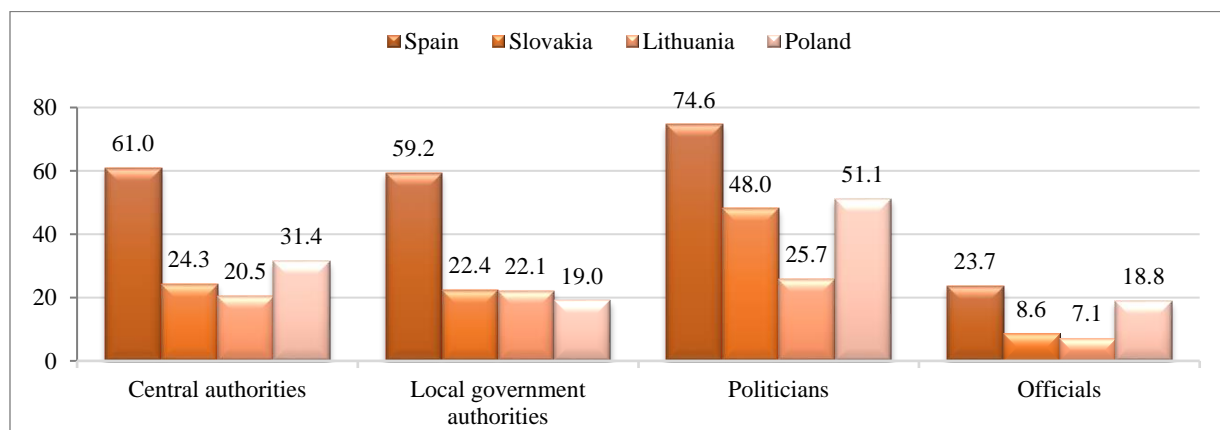

Figure 4. Lack of trust into selected institutions (% answers 'I do not trust completely'), (own study)

Out of all the surveyed student groups, positively the biggest part of the Spanish respondents indicated a lack of institutional trust. Almost ¾ of the respondents from this group do not trust politicians, and approximately 60% do not trust the central or local authorities. In the case of the other surveyed student groups, the lack of institutional trust is indicated by a significantly smaller number of the respondents – however, politicians are ranked first in this respect, but the differences are large here. Among the Polish respondents, 51.1% indicate a lack of trust towards politicians and this part is more than 23 percentage points (pp) lower than for the Spanish respondents, but as much as 26 pp bigger than that of the Lithuanian respondents and only 3 pp bigger than that of the Slovakian respondents. As far as the lack of trust towards central and local authorities is concerned, the differences in the number of respondents who

---

[4] The following scale was used: fully trust, rather trust, difficult to tell, rather do not trust, fully do not trust.

share this view in Poland, Lithuania and Slovakia is between 3–10 pp in relation to the central authorities and only approximately 3 pp in relation to the local authorities. The smallest part of the respondents from all the surveyed student groups indicates a full lack of trust towards officials. The Spanish respondents are leading also in this case, where the answer 'fully do not trust' was chosen by 23.7% of the respondents. However, this is a part approximately 5 pp bigger than that of the respondents from Poland and as much as 15–16 pp bigger than that of the respondents from Slovakia and Lithuania who do not trust officials.

Institutional trust in an important element of a community's functioning and ensuring social integrity *(Easterly, 2006)*. A significant lack of trust towards authorities and chosen institutions, characterizing in particular the Spanish students, does not bode well for the future and may result in lack of cooperation of the young generation with public institutions or even social conflicts. This also does not help in building the social skills of the analyzed students and may lead to discouragement towards undertaking actions for the benefit of local communities and their development.
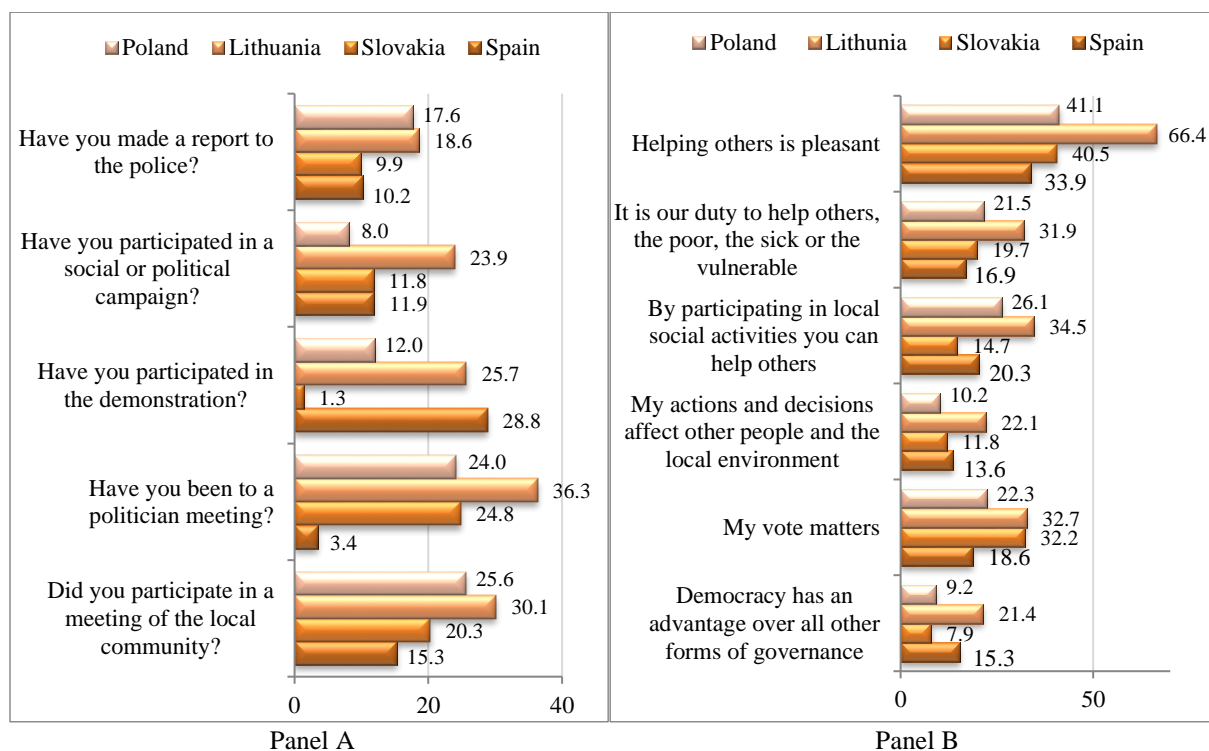

Figure 5. Social attitudes (panel A % of answers 'Yes') and social norms
(panel B % answers 'definitely yes'), (own study)

The deficit of social trust may be reflected in the social and civil attitudes taken by the respondents (fig. 5 panel A), connected with the responsibility for common matters and good. This social skill is manifested in, inter alia, the attitudes towards other people and towards reality, and it is based on the willingness and possibilities to act leading to a change (improvement) of reality. According to the research, positively more Polish, Slovakian, and also Spanish respondents (with one exception) are characterized by social responsibility. A significantly big difference is visible in the case of the respondent participation in social or political campaigns. Almost 24% of the Lithuanian respondents took part in such events, but the same was true for only 8% of the Polish respondents and for approximately 12% of Slovakian and Spanish respondents. Significant differences in favor of the Lithuanian respondents were also noted concerning the participation in manifestations. Their part in

the total number of respondents from Lithuania was approximately 14 pp bigger than that of the Polish respondents and as much as 34 pp bigger than that of the Slovaks. However, the participation in demonstrations was the biggest for the Spanish respondents, 3 pp bigger than that of the respondents from Lithuania.

Slightly smaller differences were noted in the case of meetings with politicians – slightly above 12 pp less respondents from Poland, 11 pp less from Slovakia, and 33 pp more from Spain than from Lithuania have taken part in such meetings. However, even in the case of the surveyed Lithuanian students, this is slightly more than 1/3 of all the respondents. Slightly above 15% of the Spanish, 1/5 of the Slovakian and more than 1/4 of the Polish respondents have participated in the local community meetings. Again, their part in the total number of respondents from these countries is lower than in the case of the Lithuanian respondents indicating the same level of social activity (30.1%). An active civic attitude, meaning reporting various types of abnormalities in social life, was demonstrated by 18.6% Lithuanian, 17.6% Polish, 10.2% Spanish and only 9.9% of Slovakian respondents. Taking into consideration their relatively young age, this is a quite high percentage of respondents (from Lithuania and Poland in particular) who are characterized by the responsibility for social matters and being able to handle conflict situations.

As a group of social behaviors and attitudes, social skills are manifested through the norms accepted by an individual, in the shared values and in the socially acceptable behaviors. On the one hand, social norms are a kind of hint of an individual's appropriate behavior in certain situations. On the other hand, they mean a relatively permanent manner of this individual's behavior. The results obtained from the research, concerning 6 chosen shared norms and values are presented in figure 5 panel B. Although in each case the majority of Lithuanian respondents positively share them, one should indicate a certain ambiguity of the obtained results.

A positive attitude towards democracy is held by a rather small number of the respondents from each country. Only 21.4% of the respondents from Lithuania, 9.2% from Poland and 7.9% from Slovakia believe that this form of government has an advantage over other forms. And as far as in the case of Middle-Eastern European countries, one could seek an explanation for these results in the 'youth' of their democracies, some surprise comes from the fact that only 3.5% of the respondents from Spain have expressed a positive attitude towards democracy. At the same time, 32.7% of the respondents from Lithuania, a 0.5 pp lower percentage from respondents from Slovakia, as much as 10 pp less from Poland and 14 pp from Spain positively agree with the statement that their voice has a meaning and consider themselves an important element of their communities, which they can have an influence on. Therefore, one can assume that the respondents do not connect themselves with the ability to speak, and thus also influencing the decisions and events in the democratic manner of government in those countries. Such poor assessment of democracy as the best system of governing, especially in the case of the Spanish respondents, may stem from a deficit of institutional trust, i.e. towards the authorities, among the respondents.

A positive confirmation of the assessment that helping people in need is our duty, indicating the respondents' empathy, was expressed by 31.9% of the respondents from Lithuania, 21.5% from Poland, 19.7% from Slovakia, and by 16.9% from Spain. At the same time, 34.5% of the surveyed Lithuanians came to the conclusion that participating in local community events is the correct method of helping other people, but only 22.1% of the respondents from this country are positively aware that, by their actions and the decisions made by them, they have the possibility to influence the local environment and the decisions of other people. As for the other researched groups, the possibility of helping other people through participation in local social actions is confirmed by 26.1% of the Polish, 14.7% of the Slovakian and 20.3% of the Spanish respondents. The awareness of one's own influence on other people and on the local environment is acknowledged by only 10.3% respondents from Poland, 11.8%

from Slovakia and 13.6% from Spain. At the same time, more than 2/3 of the respondents from Lithuania, over 40% from Poland and Slovakia and 1/3 from Spain believe that helping other people is pleasant. This somewhat hedonistic attitude of the respondents co-exists simultaneously with a quite large empathy, small willingness to take action and a low level of perception of one's own possibility to influence positive changes in one's nearest social surroundings. Apart from the aforementioned deficit of trust towards the local authorities, which usually participate in such events, the researched student groups are lacking some skills which would allow them to correctly solve problems and steer social situations on the local level.

5. Conclusion

Social skills are skills which influence the effective cooperation between an individual and their surroundings. These are features of individuals allowing to achieve both social inclusion, professional success, as well as satisfaction in life. Social skills, being a component of human potential and work characteristics sought by employers, increase an organization's productivity, and thus allow to achieve better management of a society. From the social point of view, it is also important that social skills are an element of civil society, leading to the efficient functioning of local and supra-local communities.

Therefore, the identification and analysis of social skills seems to be an interesting research issue, both from the individual and social point of view. And the possibility of comparing the chosen social skills of young people from four different countries on the basis of the initial research material may be an additional advantage of this study. In the near future, these exact methods will be decisive with respect to the functioning of economic and social life – therefore, the social skills held by these people will significantly influence the choices made by them.

The attempt made in this article at identifying and analyzing the social skills at the disposal of people starting their economic education at academic level on four universities from different countries, however, indicates, that these people are currently in possession of a low, however varying, level of chosen social skills. The limited range of social networks (formal and informal ones) in which the respondents participate, deficits of social trust (generalized and institutional) and also, despite the big potential, the unwillingness to indicate proper, socially desired attitudes and norms stemming from civil awareness, are not a sufficient basis for effectively handling various life situations by the respondents.

The research results cited in the literature on the subject confirm the causal link between education and increase in socially appropriate attitudes and social involvement *(Campbell, 2006)*. This suggests that also the respondents themselves, when they graduate from their universities, should be, to a larger degree than during the research, better equipped with social skills. This is why the research team repeats the same examinations on the same groups of respondents when they finish their economic education on the first degree of studies[5]. This will make it possible to analyze the correlations between academic studies of the economical type and the changes in the indicators characterizing the respondents' social skills and social capital. One should, however, remember that social skills develop during social training. Therefore, not only formal education, but also the knowledge acquired there may influence the respondents' social skills. Any knowledge which does not qualify for practical professional application, is valuable, when it stimulates the social skills of young people. They can obtain this knowledge through informal and incidental education. After all, both of these as a process of shaping knowledge, attitudes and values, last for throughout one's entire life.

---

[5] The research in Poland and Lithuania was already repeated.

References:

[1] Adamiec, M. (2011). *Potencjał ludzki w organizacji* (Human Potential of the Organization). Warszawa: Difin.

[2] Argyle, M. (2003). *Psychologia stosunków międzyludzkich* (Psychology of Human Relationships). Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.

[3] Bacigalupo, M., Kampylis:, Punie, Y. & Van den Brande, G. (2016). *EntreComp: The Entrepreneurship Competence Framework.* Luxembourg: Publication Office of the European Union. doi:10.2791/593884.

[4] Boyom, L. A. & Parke, R. D. (1995). The Role of Family Emotional Expressiveness in the Development of Children's Social Competence. *Journal of Marriage & Family,* 57(3): 593–618.

[5] Campbell, D. (2006). What Is Education's Impact on Civic and Social Engagement. *Measuring the Effects of Education on Health and Civic Engagement*. Symposium Proceedings. Copenhagen: OECD. 25–126.

[6] Civelli, F. (1998). Personal Competencies, Organizational Competencies, and Employability. *Industrial and Commercial Training,* 30(2), 48–52.

[7] Clarke, M. (2008) Understanding and Managing Employability in Changing Career Contexts. *Journal of European Industrial Training,* 32(4), 258-284.

[8] Easterly, W. (2006). Social Cohesion, Institutions, and Growth. *Working Paper,* 94, August. (Online). (Cit.: 20.04.2017). Available at: http://cgdev.org.488elwb02.blackmesh.com/sites/default/files/9136_file_WP94.pdf.

[9] European Communities. (2007). *Key competences for Lifelong Learning, European Reference Framework, Education and Culture DG*, Belgia. (Online). (Cit.: 20.04.2017). Available at: http://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/britishcouncil.uk2/files/youth-in-action-keycomp-en.pdf.

[10] Góralska, R. & Solarczyk-Szewc, H. (2012). O kompetencjach w kontekście Polskiej Ramy Kwalifikacyjnej dla uczenia się przez całe życie (Competence in the Context of the Polish Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning). *Edukacja Dorosłych,* 2, 27–41.

[11] Greenspan, S. (1981). Defining Childhood Social Competence: A Proposed Working Model. B. K. Keogh. (Ed.). *Advances in Special Education,* 3, 1–39. Greenwich: JAI Press. Za: Welskop, W. (2015) Kompetencje społeczne uczniów wyzwaniem współczesnej edukacji. *Społeczeństwa i Edukacja,* 19(4), 251–258.

[12] Holopainen, L., Lappalainen, K., Junttila, N. & Savolainen, H. (2012). The Role of Social Competence in the Psychological Well-being of Adolescents in Secondary Education. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research,* 56(2), 199–212.

[13] Jakubowska, U. (1996). Wokół pojęcia „kompetencja społeczna" – ujęcie komunikacyjne (Around the Notion of 'Social Competence' – Communication Approach). *Przegląd Psychologiczny,* 39, 29–40.

[14] Jinadasa, A. N. (2015). Human Potential Development: A New HRD Model for Turbulent Times. *China-USA Business Review,* February, 14(2), 100–116.

[15] Junttila, N., Vauras, M., Niemi, M. & Laakkonen, E. (2010). Social Competence and Socioemotional Well-being among Children and Adolescents. *Paper presented in Symposium "Assessing Social Competence in Childhood and Adolescence" in European Conference on Educational Research (ECER),* 23.–27.8.2010, Helsinki, Finland. (Online). (Cit.: 19.04.2017). Available at: http://www.eera.de/ecerprogrammes/conference/ecer-2010/contribution/2034-1/?no_cache=1&cHash=4625593b6f.

[16] Karl-Heinz, A. & Lindner-Müller, C. (2012). Assessment and Development of Social Competence: Introduction to the Special Issue. *Journal for Educational Research Online,* 4(1), 7–19. (Online). (Cit.: 19.04.2017). Available at: http://www.j-e-r-o.com/index.php/jero/article/view/302/140. ISSN 1866-6671.

[17] Ladd, G. W. (1999). Peer Relationships and Social Competence during Early and Middle Childhood. *Annual Review of Psychology,* 50, 333–359.

[18] Lifelong Learning Programme EU. (2009), *RE-CHANCE: Raising Employment Chances of Social Disadvantaged Young People. Assessment Portfolio*. (Online). (Cit.: 23.04.2017). Available at: http://www.adam-europe.eu/prj/5535/prd/2/1/RECHANCE_assessment_final_en.pdf.

[19] Martkowska, K. (2012). *Psychologiczne uwarunkowania kompetencji społecznych* (Psychological Determinants of Social Competences). Stare Kościeliska: Liberi Libri.

[20] Matczak, A. (2007). *Kwestionariusz Kompetencji Społecznych KKS. Podręcznik* (KKS Social Competence Questionnaire. Manual). Pracownia Testów Psychologicznych. Warszawa: PTP.

[21] McCabe, P. C. & Meller P. J. (2004). The Relationship between Language and Social Competence: How Language Impairment Affects Social Growth. *Psychology in the Schools,* 41(3), 313–321. doi:10.1002/pits.10161.

[22] Męczkowska, A. (2003). Kompetencja (Competence). T. Pilch. (Ed.). *Encyklopedia pedagogiczna XXI wieku*, t. II, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Żak.

[23] Milczarek, A., Miłaszewicz, D., Nagaj, R., Szkudlarek, P. & Zakrzewska, M. (2015). Social Networks as a Determinant of the Socialisation of Human Capital. *Human Resources Management & Ergonomics,* 9(2), 89–103.

[24] Miłaszewicz, D. (2014). Social Competence of Young Poles in the Light of the Survey on Social Capital of Students Attending the University of Szczecin (Poland). *World Journal of Applied and Life Sciences,* 1(3), 14–25.

[25] Moczydłowska, J. (2010). *Zarządzanie zasobami ludzkimi w organizacji* (Human Resource Management in Organization). Warszawa: Difin.

[26] Nurmi, J. E. (2011). Social Strategies during University Studies Predict Early Career Work Burnout and Engagement: 18-year Longitudinal Study. *Journal of Vocational Behavior,* 79(1), 145–157. Za: Jagiełło-Rusiłowski, A. (2011). *Fiński model kształcenia i oceniania kompetencji społecznych – inspiracje dla polskich interesariuszy szkolnictwa wyższego*. Warszawa: Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych.

[27] OECD. (2005). *The Definition and Selection of Key Competences*. (Online). (Cit.: 16.04.2017). Available at: http://www.oecd.org/pisa/35070367.pdf.

[28] Otten, H. & Ohana Y. (2009). *The Eight Key Competencies for Lifelong Learning: An Appropriate Framework Within Which To Develop The Competence of Trainers in The Field of European Youth Work or Just Plain Politics?* Bonn: IKAB and SALTO-YOUTH Training and Cooperation Reosurce Centre.

[29] Partnership for 21st Century Skills. (2010). *21st Century Knowledge and Skills in Educator Preparation,* September. (Online). (Cit.: 16.04.2017). Available at: http://www.p21.org/storage/documents/aacte_p21_whitepaper2010.pdf.

[30] Productivity Commission. (2003). Social Capital: Reviewing the Concept and its Policy Implications. *Commission Research Paper*, AusInfo. (Online). (Cit.: 17.04.2017). Available at: http://www.pc.gov.au/research/completed/social-capital/socialcapital.pdf.

[31] Reitz, S. (2012). *Improving Social Competence via E-learning?: The example of Human Rights Education*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, GmbH, Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften.

[32] Riggio, R. E. (1986). Assessment of Basic Social Skills. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 51, 640–660.

[33] Rymsza, M. (2008). Zapomniany kapitał Solidarności. Ekonomia solidarna w Polsce po 1989 roku (Forgotten Solidarity Capital. Solidarity Economy in Poland after 1989). *Więź*, 4–5(594), 26–35.

[34] Sajkiewicz, A. (2001) Organizacja procesów personalnych w firmie (Organization of HR Processes in a Company). K. Makowski. (Ed.). *Zarządzanie pracownikami. Instrumenty polityki personalne*j (s. 30–42). Poltext: Warszawa.

[35] Smółka. (2016). *Kompetencje społeczne metody pomiaru i doskonalenia umiejętności interpersonalnych* (Social Competences in the Method of Measuring and Improving Interpersonal Skills). Warszawa: Wolters Kluwer.

[36] Spitzberg, B. H. & Cupach, W. R. (2002). Interpersonal Skills. H. L. Knapp & J. A. Daly. (Eds.). *Handbook of Interpersonal Communication*. Sage: Thousand Oaks.

[37] Szołtysek, J., Jeż, R. & Twaróg, S. (2015). Kompetencje społeczne w okresie kształcenia zawodowego na potrzeby logistyki społecznej (Social Competences during Vocational Training for Social Logistics Purposes). *Studia Ekonomiczne, Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego w Katowicach,* 249, 11–22.

[38] UNESCO. (2014). *Global Citizenship Education. Preparing learners for the challenges of the twenty-first century.* Paris. (Online). (Cit.: 16.04.2017). Available at: http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002277/227729E.pdf.

[39] Welsh, J. A. & Bierman K. L. (2001). *Social Competence. Encyclopedia of Childhood and adolescence.* (Online). (Cit.: 18.04.2017). Available at: http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_g2602/is_0004/ai_2602000487?tag=content;co1.

[40] Wiszejko-Wierzbicka, D. (2012). *Kompetencje społeczne – rozpoznanie i rozwój* (Social Competences – Recognition and Development). Łódź. (Online). (Cit.: 21.04.2017). Available at: http://projektmlodziez.pl/wp-content/plugins/download-monitor/download.php?id=7.

[41] Woodruffe, Ch. (2003). *Ośrodki oceny i rozwoju. Narzędzia analizy i doskonalenia kompetencji pracowników* (Evaluation and Development Centers. Tools for Analyzing and Improving the Competence of Employees). Kraków Oficyna Ekonomiczna, Dom Wydawniczy ABC.

[42] World Economic Forum. (2017). *Realizing Human Potential in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. An Agenda for Leaders to Shape the Future of Education, Gender and Work*, White Paper. January. (Online). (Cit.: 23.04.2017). Available at: http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_EGW_Whitepaper.pdf.

[43] Zabierowski, M. (2011). Potencjał ludzki a kapitał ludzki − rozważania antropologiczne (Human Potential and Human Capital - Anthropological Considerations). *Zeszyty Naukowe WSOWL,* 4(162), 370–382.

Addresses of authors:

Prof. US Danuta MIŁASZEWICZ
Faculty of Economics and Management
University of Szczecin
Mickiewicza 64/66
71-101 Szczecin
Poland
e-mail: dmilasz@wneiz.pl

Rafał NAGAJ, PhD.
Faculty of Economics and Management
University of Szczecin
Mickiewicza 64/66
71-101 Szczecin
Poland
e-mail: wasik@wneiz.pl